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ABSTRACT

A Florida program of assessment and accountability, wherein student achievement of specified minimum objectives is measured on a statewide level, is summarized. Background information, objective selection procedures, program management, and information utilization are discussed. (DG)

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A SYSTEM OF EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT IN THE STATE OF FLORIDA

by

James C. Impara

INTRODUCTION

Florida is embarking on a new concept of educational accountability. This concept includes the assessment of student achievement of specified minimum objectives. The statewide assessment of minimum objectives will provide information to state and local decision makers about the adequacy of statewide basic educational programs.

The purpose for the state's assessing minimum objectives is to provide the incentive for establishing a basic educational program for all Florida students which will minimize the frequency of societal rejection of individuals for their lack of certain basic skills. This means that minimum objectives will have to be reviewed and revised periodically to reflect changes in the standards set by the public. In this way the "average" level of performance can gradually be raised.

BACKGROUND

Legislation passed in 1970 (Chapter 70-399, Laws of Florida) required the Commissioner of Education to develop assessment procedures which would

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permit the comparison of school districts with each other and, if possible, the comparison of the State of Florida with other states or regions, with respect to the progress of education.

A task force was formed in the Department of Education to prepare a plan for implementing the act. The principal components of the Plan for Educational Assessment in Florida were written as a result of discussions held by the task force. The Educational Accountability Act of 1971 (Chapter 229.57, Fl la Statutes) was passed, indicating that the conditions of Chapter 70-399 and the procedures set forth in the Plan would be carried out.

In anticipation of the Educational Accountability Act, activities began in January, 1971, when the Department of Education started preliminary negotiations with the Center for the Study of Evaluation (CSE) at the University of California in Los Angeles for the development of exercises to assess reading in the 1971-72 school year. On March 1, 1971, the Research and Development Program contracted with CSE to provide Florida with instruments and techniques with which to conduct statewide assessment in reading in grades two, four, seven, and ten. CSE provided a comprehensive catalog of reading objectives from which Florida reading specialists and classroom teachers selected the high priority objectives to be measured in the 1971-72 assessment program.

OBJECTIVE SELECTION MODEL

The first attempt at a statewide assessment of learner behaviors utilized the SOB-R materials developed by the CSE. In early 1971, the

SOB-R objectives were reviewed by Department of Education staff. After this internal review of the objectives, they were distributed to a group of 348 reading specialists and classroom teachers in the State of Florida. The purposes for distributing the objectives were to (1) establish the level at which each objective should be mastered (levels were defined as grades two, four, seven, and ten) and (2) after objectives had been assigned to the appropriate level, the 348 participants were asked to select those objectives which were of highest priority. "Highest priority" was operationally defined as objectives which virtually all students should attain at the level specified.

The survey provided reasonable estimates of appropriate levels for various objectives, but few objectives were rejected in the priority listing, i.e. most of the objectives were determined to be of highest priority. Consequently, the Department of Education brought in a consultant in reading to reduce the list to a more manageable size. The reduction was based on the responses from the 348 participants. The reduced list of objectives for grades two and four were ultimately adopted by the State Board of Education as the high priority objectives for reading in Florida for students seven and nine years of age. The change from grade level to age level was done to establish a precedent for eventually shifting away from the traditional grade structure.

The objective selection procedure has been determined to be a reasonable one although some minor modifications will be made. The modifications are that (1) no limitations are placed on which age, or grade level, is to be selected, that is, the range of grades will be K-12 rather

than two, four, seven, and ten, (2) the redundancy will be eliminated before objectives are sent to teachers in the field (the second modification resulted because of the redundancy evidenced in the objectives which were selected), (3) lay people will be involved in the selection of high priority objectives.

However, the basic model of preparing a catalog of objectives, disseminating that catalog to groups of teachers and subject matter specialists in the field for their recommendation as to which objectives should be of highest priority will be used in other curriculum areas, including writing and mathematics which are to be assessed in 1972-73.

In addition to establishing an operational model, several benefits have accrued to the Department of Education and to the school districts. The primary benefit has been in the area of communication. As a result of the establishment of accountability legislation and through the use of the model, it has been essential to involve school district personnel and teachers in the selection activity. This has significantly improved communication between school district personnel and Department of Education personnel and between educational program consultants and assessment personnel within the Department of Education.

MANAGEMENT OF THE ASSESSMENT PROGRAM

The basic administrative network for conducting the assessment program includes the Evaluation Section of the Bureau of Research, Division of Elementary and Secondary Education, Department of Education, 67 district

coordinators for accountability, school coordinators for assessment, and test administrators. The district coordinators were named by their respective superintendents in August, 1971. The school coordinators and test administrators were selected by their principals to assist with the February, 1972, reading assessment.

While the primary activities of the Evaluation Section are devoted to test development and analysis, the section has been responsible for a number of other activities in the last seven months, including dissemination of high priority objectives, pretesting of assessment procedures, information dissemination, and long-range planning.

After high priority objectives for grades two and four (ages seven and nine) were selected, the Evaluation Section organized the objectives, prepared them in preliminary copy form, and submitted them for adoption to the State Board of Education on September 14, 1971. The section distributed the final version of "High Priority Objectives for Reading in Florida, Ages 7 and 9" to district superintendents and coordinators. The coordinators also received copies for distribution within their districts.

Staff members from various sections in the Department of Education have been meeting to discuss plans for the assessment and accountability programs for the school years from 1973-74 through 1977-78. A comprehensive assessment program will be organized to measure the seven "Goals for Student Development in Florida". These goal areas relate to communication and learning skills, citizenship education, occupational interests, mental and physical health, home and family relationships, aesthetic and cultural

appreciations, and human relations.

The plans are concerned with the development and implementation of an assessment program with these characteristics:

1. measurement of achievement of minimum educational objectives* and of selected optional objectives*;

2. use of both criterion-referenced and norm-referenced tests to determine pupil achievement of objectives;

3. economy and efficiency of testing, with regard both to costs and to pupil time;

4. testing of all students on some objectives and of samples of students on other objectives;

5. coordination of state assessment efforts with the statewide Ninth and Twelfth Grade Testing Programs.

Exact procedures are being worked out in the Department of Education in cooperation with personnel in the school districts and other involved groups.

USE OF RESULTS OF ASSESSMENT

The tests have been designed to measure specific objectives selected by teachers and other educators in the State of Florida (Florida's "High Priority Objectives for Reading in Florida, Ages 7 and 9"). Objectives are measured by one or more test items. Results of performance on the objectives will be reported, except when:

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*Minimum objectives are those which virtually all students should be able to achieve by specified times in their educational experience. Optional objectives are those which exceed the minimums; they should be achieved by students with certain abilities and aspirations.

1. No items were submitted by the contractor to measure that objective;
2. A panel of reading experts indicated that the item was not a valid measure of the objective; or
3. A panel of reading experts indicated that the item had serious technical difficulties, and their judgment was supported by an analysis of student performance on that item.

The tests will be analyzed by finding the percentage of students who have achieved the objective by correctly answering a predetermined portion of the items related to that objective. Results will be reported in terms of the percentage of students in each district and in the state who achieve each objective. Results will not be reported on individual pupil or school performance.

Table 1 is an example of how the results from February's assessment will be reported. The objectives are subdivided into the four skill groups (skills prerequisite to reading, skills in the mechanics of reading, skills to aid in reading comprehension, and utilization of reading skills). Student performance on each of the four skill areas is included in the table, in terms of the percentage of students who achieve each objective within the skill area. These results are reported for each district and for the state as a whole.

EXAMPLE OF TABLE OF RESULTS

Table 1. Percentage of second grade students in each district and the state achieving High Priority Objectives for Reading, Group 3, Skills in the Mechanics of Reading.[1]

DISTRICT	ACHIEVEMENT OF EACH OBJECTIVE													
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Alachua	%	%	%	%	%	*	%	%	%	*	*	%	*	%
2. Baker						*				*	*		*	
3. Bay						*				*	*		*	
4. Bradford						*				*	*		*	
5. Brevard						*				*	*		*	
.						*				*	*		*	
.						*				*	*		*	
.						*				*	*		*	
.						*				*	*		*	
.						*				*	*		*	
.						*				*	*		*	
63. Union						*				*	*		*	
64. Volusia						*				*	*		*	
65. Wakulla						*				*	*		*	
66. Walton						*				*	*		*	
67. Washington						*				*	*		*	
STATE	%	%	%	%	%	*	%	%	%	*	*	%	*	%

[1]Results of performance in each skill group will be reported in tables like this one.

*Results of performance on this objective are unavailable; see p. 25.